[Interview with Mrs. William C. Heacock]

Janet Smith,

Field Worker.

About 1400 words.

PIONEER STORIES

[Interview?] with Mrs. William C. Heacock

Mrs. Heacock laughed when I said I had heard that her husband had been a famous judge in the old days in Albuquerque. Notorious had been the word that first occurred to me but I had of-course rejected it.

She didn't think that she could tell me stories about her husband's career so well because she had never paid much attention to his business. She had been busy raising her family. She remembered well enough the shack she had lived in—you couldn't call it a house—and lucky to get that for there weren't any real houses in Albuquerque in those days. The shack had been on South Second Street where the Crystal Beer Garden now stands. It was a dusty spot and she wanted her husband to buy a little land near Robinson Park where there were a few trees and a pump. She would have been satisfied with a one room house and a tent there, she said, but her husband said a house built on that spot would sink into the quicksands in no time. “He had no eye for business, ” she said. “He knew just one thing—the law.”

She remembered too the board sidewalks and how the planks would bob up first on one end and then on the other see-saw like as she pushed her baby carriage over them. There were half a dozen saloons to every block and the cowboys would loll in the doorways and

against the walls competitively spitting amber juice. “When I think of it now, ” she said, “but it seemed natural enough to me then.” C18 - N. Mex.

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One night, about 1890 she thought, she was just clearing away the supper table when she heard shots outside. She ran to the door to see what was happening, when her husband called her back. The safest thing to do at such times was to lie down on the floor. The drunken cowboys generally had no desire to kill anyone, but it was safer to keep out of the way of their bullets. On one occasion a cowboy had killed a child. He was drunk and looking for black cats to shoot at. He was horrified when he realized what he had done, but they hung him. They had to make an example of someone in order to make Albuquerque safe for their children. Mr. Heacock had prosecuted the case, and was so upset when the man was hung that he refused thereafter to serve except as a defense lawyer.

Another time Billy the Kid had come to the door to get her husband to help him out of some kind of a scrape. Mrs. Heacock had answered the door. She said he looked like any nice young lad to her. Afterward everyone was talking about him, and she was glad she'd seen him, but she didn't ever believe any of that talk about his being a bad character. They were after him, and he had to protect himself, didn't he?

I asked Mrs. Heacock if the story about her husband's fining the dead man for carrying concealed weapons were true. She laughed and said it was true all right, but she couldn't remember “just how it went.”

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This is the story as it was told to me, somewhat embellished with time perhaps, but a good story, and according to Mrs.Heacock based on fact.

Judge William C. Heacock and his cronies were playing three card monte in the back room of a saloon. The cards were against the Judge that evening and along about one in the morning he found himself without funds to continue his game. As was customary with the

Judge in such critical situations, he called in his deputies who were drinking at the bar in the next room.

“Get me a drunk,” he ordered “a drunk with money in his pockets who is guilty of disorderly conduct.”

The deputies departed on their familiar mission, and the Judge retired to the Court Room on the upper floor, where he prepared to hold a session of night court. A town like Albuquerque needed a night court to keep it in order.

Before long the deputies returned, carrying a limp man between them.

“What the Hell?” said the Judge. “What's that you got?”

“Your Honor,” replied one of the deputies, as be straightened up from placing his burden on the floor, “we found him in the back room of The Blue Indigo.”

“Can he stand trial or is he dead drunk?” asked the Judge.

“He's not drunk, but he's dead all right. He croaked himself over there in the Blue Indigo. The proprietor insisted that we get him out of there.”

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The Judge was annoyed. “Didn't the fools ever hear of an inquest?” he asked. He had sent for a lucrative drunk, not a drooling suicide.

He turned solemnly to his deputies. “This court is a court of justice,” he said. “The right of habeas corpus must not be ignored. The prisoner must be given a speedy and fair trial. This court is ready to hear evidence. What is the charge?”

“Your Honor,” spoke one of the deputies. “The charge has not yet been determined.”

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“This court will hear no case without a charge. Did you search the prisoner?”

“There was a letter to some dame—-” began the deputy.

“Any money?”

The deputy counted $27.32.

“Any weapons?”

They took a gun from the hip pocket.

“Has the prisoner anything to say before sentence is imposed upon him?”

Judge Heacock cooked his ear expectantly toward the prone prisoner. “In view of the unresponsiveness of the prisoner which this court interpret as contempt, and in view of the unlawful possession of a lethal weapon this court imposes a fine of $20.00 and court costs,” pronounced the Judge.

“You might as well leave him there till morning,” said the Judge as he pocketed the money. The monte game continued on the floor below.

Mr. Heacock says they used to do funny things in Albuquerque 5 in those days. And many of them were done in the name of justice. Sbe remembers the time when a well dressed stranger arrived on the train from the East. He took a hack to the hotel on First Street and was just paying the hack driver, when two big deputies arrested him and took him to court for being a suspicious character. “Because he was too well dressed and they needed money for the city that day,” she added.

And then there is the story of how Judge Heacock sent Elfego Baca to his own jail for a month. Mrs. Heacock laughed about that one too.

The story is told in Kyle Crichton's book “Law and Order Ltd.”

Judge Heacock's deputies were out searching for a drunk for the night court. When they tried to arrest Jesus Romero, who was a friend of Elfego Baca's, Mr. Baca objected to the extent of whanging one of the policemen over the head with his huge silver watch. The injured man was one of Albuquerque's favorite policeman, and when the crowd saw him lying unconscious, they assisted the other deputy in escorting Mr. Baca to the night court. Romero was completely forgotten.

“Disorderly conduct” was the charge which Mr. Baca denied with some heat. But the night sergeant had discovered $18.19 in his pocket.

“Thirty days or ten dollars and costs,” said the Judge.

But they couldn't pull that stuff on Mr. Baca. He took the thirty days, and a deputy accompanied him to the jail in Old Town where unbeknown to the Judge, Mr. Baca had recently been 6 appointed jailer. The name of E. Baca was signed in the record, and the jailer, Mr. Elfigo Baca, received the regular seventy-five cents a day for the feeding of the prisoner. At the end of the month Mr. Baca was $22.50 the richer for his encounter with the Albuquerque night court.

Perhaps it is only fair to add a bit concerning the more serious side of Judge Heacock's career. He graduated from Annapolis in the days when graduating classes were very small, studied law in Philadelphia, and at one time surveyed the harbor at Rio de Janiero. Mrs. Heacock said that he had many offers to leave Albuquerque for positions in all parts of the country. But life as he was able to live it in New Mexico evidently suited him best.

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About 1600 words.

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The other day Mr. Heacock told me a story of a trip to Jemez that had all the elements of a good western story of the old days—-covered wagons and Indians, quicksands and a wall of water.

She and Judge Heacock started out with their two babies for Jemez Springs—-a three day trip by wagon. They traveded in a big covered wagon, called an ambulance, from the Spanish “ambulanza.” They had six horses, two to pull the wagon, and four extra in case of trouble. They took what furniture they would need in Jemez, two boys to drive and care for the horses, and a girl to care for the babies,—-though Mrs. Heacock said she never did because she was always talking to the boys.

“I never wanted to go in the first place,” Mrs. Heacock said, “but the Judge wouldn't have it that way. We had to sleep on the ground, right on the ground with my two babies I was so particular about. We would coil the big ropes used for the horses around us to protect us from the snakes, but I was always scared to death, though I was so tired at night I couldn't help sleeping some. The coyotes would howl, and my it was a fright, but that man of mine would go in spite of anything.”

The second day out they got lost on a mountain. The men went to look for someone who could help them to find the right road again.

“I didn't like that at all,” Mrs. Heacock said, “being left there alone with only that helpless girl and my two babies, and heaven knew what wild animals and Indians were about.”

Suddenly they heard a whoop, and an Indian came riding over the hill.

“I gabbed the gun,” Mrs. Heacock said, “though goodness knows I didn't know how to shoot one. And there were my two babies lying in the bottom of the wagon, and that Indian riding right for us for all he was worth. I decided to wait till he got almost to us, before I tried to shoot. Then he yelled, ‘Pretty soon—pretty soon, now’, and I put the gun down. He meant they were going to get us out of there pretty soon.”

That night they spent in an Indian settlement—-Zia, Mrs. Heacock thought it was. They had a whole one room house to themselves with a big bed for Mrs. Heacock and the girl and the babies. She thought that was considerably better than sleeping on the ground, until the men began to pile the furniture in front of the door. Then she realized that they were afraid of the Indians, and she couldn't sleep a bit all night. “I just lay there and expected those babies to be scalped before morning,” she told me.

But morning came, and the babies cried safely. The men got up from the floor and stretched and moved the furniture away from the door. Mrs. Heacock went out to the wagon to get some things for the babies, and every single thing that could be moved was gone. That made the rest of the trip even worse for her.

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“As if we hadn't had hard enough of a time already—-that day we were right in the middle of a river when the wagon began to sink. Quicksands. It had been a good fording place the year before, but the sands shift. The men took off their shoes and socks and rolled up their trousers and carried me and my two babies and the girl to the bank. Then they hitched up the other four horses and after a lot of splashing and heaving and swearing they pulled out of there.”

“I sure was exhausted when we finally got to Jemez with my two babies. But the flies there were such a sight, I made up my mind to go right back. They offered me every inducement

they could think of to stay, but I had my mind all made up, and the next day I started back with my two babies on the stage.

“The first day I ate a lunch at a woman's house and every bit of it was bad. The egg was bad and the meat was bad. I got very sick and the baby I was nursing got sick too. That baby just yelled and screamed continually and the people on the stage were so mad they wouldn't / speak to me. Finally I got so sick I made the driver stop and let me lie on the ground. The passengers were all wanting to put me back in the stage and get on our way for they wanted to get home. I never saw such selfish people. But the driver did what I told him. Finally I became absolutely rigid, and then two women did get out and rub me until I was / better and could climb back into the wagon. They said afterwards I had a fit. But I never had a fit in my life. I was just 4 plain sick and no wonder.

“We had stopped on one side of an arroyo, and we no more than got over that arroyo and a little way on the other side, when a wall of water as high as a three story house swept down. It was a pretty sight to see, but it sure would have dashed us and the wagon to bits [ifwe?] had been in the middle of the arroyo a minute sooner. That gave us all a turn, and the people were more friendly to me the rest of the journey.

“I declare I thought I'd never go on a trip like that again, but the next summer we started off just the same.”

Mrs. Heacock sat rocking and thinking on her front porch. Suddenly she turned to me. “One thing I want to tell you though,” she said, “and I want to impress it upon you, men were a lot more considerate of their women folks in those days than they are to-day—a lot more considerate. It seems to me from all I see that they aren't a'tall considerate these days.”

“How do you account for it?” I asked.

“I think its because women have taken to working and earning their own money,” she answered. “They had to I s'pose. There were plenty of men in those days that used to gamble and drink up their pay check before they ever got home with it. I guess that's why the girls went to work. They saw what their mothers had to put up with. Well, t guess it about evens up, but in little ways, the men were lots more considerate then.”

Some people walked by and Mrs. Heacock asked if I knew them.

“I don't,“she said. “It seems funny too. There was a time 5 when I knew everybody. When I went out wheeling my two babies, everybody spoke to me and helped me over the rough places. Now I hardly know the people who walk past my house. Why, I can remember the time when the people here would carry Mr. Heacock through the streets on their shoulders after he had won a case.

“Mr. Heacock was always loyal to his clients and they liked him. Though lots of people censured him for things he did. I guess I told you that story about the time he fined the dead man? Another time I remember, they were gambling and needed some money, and they brought in ten Chinamen to the night court. Two o'clock in the morning it was and the deputies went out and rounded up those ten Chinamen. They hadn't done anything, I suppose, but the night sergeant counted what money they had in their pockets, and then Judge Heacock fined them almost that much for disorderly conduct. He always left his victims enough for breakfast. ‘Cruel and inhuman' I told him, but the Chinamen never said a word. The Judge knew the first one they brought in. ‘I'm sorry, John,” he said, but it's the mandate of the law hanging over your head.” And after he had fined that one, he said, ‘Bring on the next queu.’

Mrs. Heacock laughed. “I used to get mad at him when he came home and told me those things he'd done, and people did censure him.”

“Still, she went on, “he was better than some of those that censured him. His clients thought a lot of him. He defended thirty-eight or forty accused murderers and never lost but two 6 of those cases.”

I remembered what Mr. George Klock, who had opposed Mr. Heacock in many cases said to me about him:

“He was irregular—a bit irregular. But he never broke his word, and he was a brilliant man. If he had cared a little more for his health and his morals, he would have made his mark high. As it was, he had a following that was as loyal to him as subjects to their king.”

The first story related by Mrs. Heacock took place between Albuquerque and Jemez about 1895. The Indians concerned were from the Zia Pueblo, and it was there that Mrs. Heacock and her family spent the night. The river mentioned was probably the Jemez Creek, although Mrs. Heacock was not sure.

The story concerning Judge Heacock's Night Court might have occurred any time during the ‘90's—-Mrs. Heacock could not tell exactly. It, of course, happened in Albuquerque.

Mrs. William C. Heacock lives at 402 Princeton Ave., Albuquerque.

Mr. George Klock lives at 315 North 10th St., Albuquerque.

Following are the names and addresses of informants of previous pioneer stories:

Ella May Chavez, Belen, N. M. (frequently at the Ives Memorial Bldg. of the Methodist San., Albuquerque).

Elfego Baca, 523 W. Gold Ave., Albuquerque, N. M.